

PEOPLE WITH STRENGTH

The story of
MONROE
N.C.

TRUMAN
NELSON

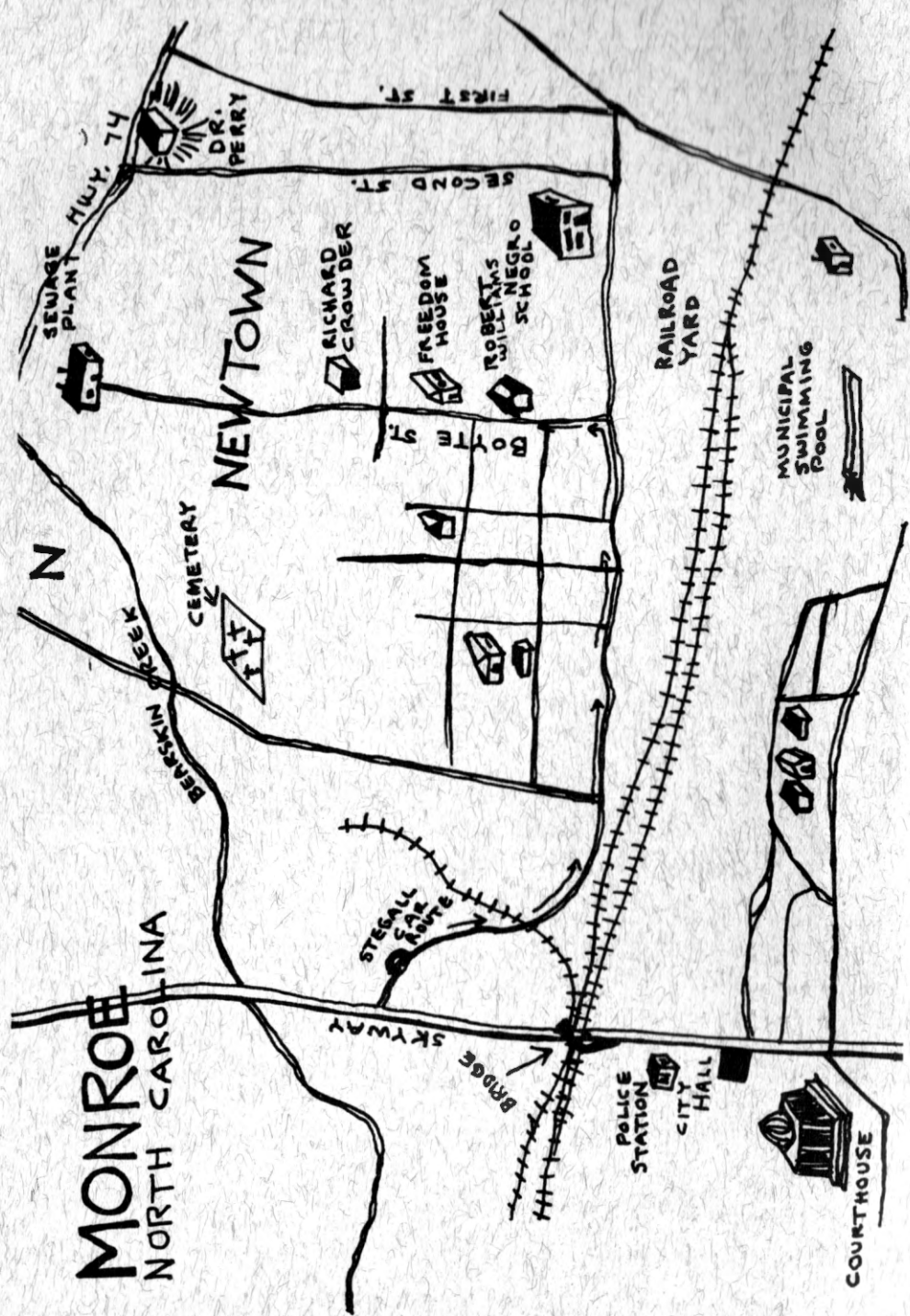


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PEOPLE WITH STRENGTH

in

Monroe, North Carolina

by

Truman Nelson

"I wish my countrymen to consider, that whatever the human law may be, neither an individual nor a nation can ever commit the least act of injustice against the obscurest individual without having to pay the penalty for it. A government which deliberately enacts injustice and persists in it, will at length even become the laughing stock of the world."

Henry David Thoreau

Monroe, North Carolina is the headquarters of the southeastern brigades of the Ku Klux Klan. They have built a fine permanent brick building there.

The shocking news that pickets were marching in protest against racist wrongs had penetrated deep into South Carolina, (the border is scarcely ten miles away), and the mobs watching the pickets were thickening and coagulating into dense cores of violence.

Every day there were fresh arrivals of racist whites, more guns were seen, and more roughs to use them. A picket had already been shot in the belly with a pellet gun. It was a grazing shot, and drew no blood. But when the act and the car from which it had come was pointed out to the police, they shrugged it off. Nor did they take notice of the shouted threats and obscenities bubbling up, little hot explosions of hate coming faster and more constant, like the top of a pot of oatmeal coming to a boil...a hate both feeding and consuming some five thousand citizens of these United States who could not bear the thought that black people and white people could be together.

It was August 17, 1961, and hot with that dead calm Southern heat which presses over the whole body like a strangling weight against the throat. As the pickets moved wearily through the hate-impacted air, they must have had second thoughts of the meeting held just before they came out on the line. They had first voted not to go. Things were heating up too much. On Saturday, while following their careful plan of walking back to their sanctuary in Newtown at five o'clock, exactly when they were expected, cars filled with screaming, frenzied, pistol-waving racists drove viciously at them at intersections trying to cut them off from one another, trying to chop them down with obscenity and blows.

But they had planned to picket the Monroe Courthouse for a week and they had such discipline, such commitment, that going ahead at the very worst of moments was the strongest compulsion of all. So, first they talked it out, admitted the perils and the reasons for observing them, and then, almost wordlessly, formed their pathetic little line of march and went back up to the Square to take their lumps one more time. To look again into faces deformed and dehumanized by ignorant anger, to sense madness and frenzy billowing around them, to listen to words that no man or woman should say to one another under any circumstances.

They tried again to stare the haters down with their own convictions of love, again they would not speak until spoken to and then softly, with words to turn away wrath, again they would carry

no thought of returning a curse or a blow...again they would walk softly with their signs constructed to the exact specifications of the local law.

Freedom Riders under C.O.R.E. discipline try to use the law with intelligent restraint. This group had informed state and municipal authorities when and why they were coming in. At once, the Monroe authorities had rushed through constricting rules on picketing. They were to stay 15 feet apart. They should never brush other pedestrians, or obstruct passage in any way. The signs they carried had to be of special dimensions. The first really bad moment with the law came as Richard Griswold, their photographer, tried to take pictures of the police checking the signs with tape measures. First, the police threatened to smash the camera over his head, and then told him that it was illegal in Monroe, North Carolina, to take pictures of people. When he expressed doubt that any such absurdity was on the books, he was arrested for interfering with an officer. Another Freedom Rider took his place with the camera and within the hearing of the officer, was threatened with death by several white citizens.

The reprisal instantly planned and stored for Richard Griswold's questioning irreverence came Sunday. He was thrown into a cell with a white racist named Howard Stack. Stack weighs 250 pounds; Griswold weighs 150. Not that this disparity in their physical condition mattered; Griswold, a white boy from Brooklyn, is a dedicated practitioner of non-resistance. Stack could have weighed 100 pounds and gone to work on him as he did in this cell, situated remotely in the prison basement. Stack fractured two of Griswold's ribs, broke his nose, stamped methodically on his stomach and then on his head until it rested wearily in a pool of its own blood.

Griswold's outcries during the beating were never heard because of a fire door separating this cell from the rest of the jail but someone saw his head in the blood, thought he was dead then, and the Warden sent for a doctor. So he is alive to testify as to the truth of this.

The most horrifying aspect of the ordeals of the Freedom Riders is what happens in Southern jails. It is impossible to believe that even the criminal types infesting them can be as brutal as they invariably are in kicking and flogging the young lads they are given as cellmates. But the fact is that the beatings are not personal but penal, and are usually arranged by the officers of the law themselves as part and parcel of the process of enforcement. The real tragedy comes with the realization that these cruel and bloody beatings of innocents and non-resistants are administered by men

wheedled and coerced into obscene bargains by the very forces who have taken oaths to restrain and rehabilitate their criminality. Think of the self-debauchery, the corroding knowledge of the hypocrisy of officialdom that this involves.

This is why Howard Stack nearly beat the life out of Richard Griswold, a man he had never met, and who had never injured him and who would not have struck back in anger if his life depended on it. Stack said this in his own words, in a handwritten statement later passed to the doctor treating Griswold for his wounds. "On or about the 4th Sunday in August, I was in Union County Jail on five charges of worthless checks and two assault charges. The Monroe police and Deputy forces of the City of Monroe put to me a proposition. If I would by force assault one of the Freedom Riders, Griswold, they would see that I went free of my charges. This beating I did in the bottom cell of the Union County Jail. I went free for two weeks and was picked back up and sentenced for the crimes which were supposed to be dropped for the assault I did for them. They turned their back on me is why I confessed to this. Signed, Howard Stack".

So it was not only an obscene and debauching bargain, it was made by cheats and never carried out. But this practice is so inextricably connected with the regular process of North Carolina law enforcement that when the handwritten letter was sent to the U.S. Attorney General by the lawyer for the Monroe victims, Conrad Lynn, the answer came back that, "our investigation failed to reveal sufficient evidence to establish the violation of a Federal Criminal Statute. Consequently, we have closed our file in this matter". It was signed by Burke Marshall, head of the Justice Dept. Civil Rights Division.

The confession had been sent to him for action under Section 242 of the Civil Rights Law which states clearly the responsibility of the Federal Government in protecting citizens of all states against corrupt local police power. That the Justice Department did not act on this complaint surprises no one. It has long been realized that there is no Interstate Justice Commission: that there is no conscience in the Justice Department to which the harassed reformer or the racial victim can appeal.

Although this privileged bloodletting took place after the eruption on the picket line, pre-awareness of it existed. The pickets carried the burden of knowing what awaited them in every jail in the South, every day they were on the line. They were beaten in Mississippi jails, Texas jails, Alabama jails, the innocent white

boys, the desperate black boys, coming down from the North to show on their vulnerable young bodies, the awful stigmata of racist wrongs which lie under the skin of all Americans. They wanted this stigmata to appear on their own bodies in hope that their bruised human flesh would finally get us to do something about this deep, deep shame.

So for two hours they plodded their weary way around the huge brick courthouse with a lighted cross on its top and the Confederate Monument casting its long shadow of a slave-driving past over its doors. On they shuffled, 15 feet apart, bereft of the friendly jostling, the kidding and interchange that helps drive out fear ... hoping their professed love would drive out fear in their enemies as in themselves, yet knowing that as the moments passed, the racist mob was thickening and coming nearer. The angry, broken murmur of curses and threats was fusing into a chant; the volatile elements in the mob of 5000 were getting drunker and drunker. The area of explosion was spreading like a flowing pool of gasoline creeping to a source of ignition.

It takes time for any people to get as mean as they can be when they are completely mindless. They have to drop themselves downward and become accustomed to a period of degradation and dehumanization. They have to rag and whip themselves to the point where they can, collectively, and in a wild rush, attack and maul defenseless people of principle. By now it was well known that the picketers always left the line at five o'clock. So there was a perceptible upsurge in the hum of anger in the square, like a dynamo revving-up to carry a climactic load.

At 4:45, the picket captain, James Forman, decided to call Newtown for taxis to come and pick up the pickets in the face of this palpable threat. There is a public telephone booth on the northeast corner of the courthouse grounds. Alas, it had been occupied for an hour by a white racist who was sitting there for the very purpose of blocking off any call for help. Somehow, one picket

got through to the nearby hotel telephone and called for the cars to come and pick up the others. But at the stroke of five, the racist mob was so turbulent and huge that only one car, driven by a stout brave Negro named Woodrow Wilson, got through them. The mob, worked by now into a proper mindless state, began to surge forward as the picket line disintegrated.

There was on the line that day, and for several days, a young brunette English woman by the name of Constance Lever. She was then 20 years old and a student in the London School of Economics. She had come to take her stand there by a curious but fascinating route. In London, she had been an ardent member of an Anti-Apartheid Committee. In this Committee had arisen the name of the man who may be the most prophetic figure in the whole present upsurge of the desegregation movement, Robert Williams, a resident of Newtown in Monroe. Williams, a kind of William Lloyd Garrison, John Brown, and Frederick Douglass combined, had been agitating about the crime of racism in the U.S.A. in a small mimeographed paper called the *Crusader* so effectively that it had achieved international comment. Constance Lever, planning a trip to the United States to visit her aunt, decided to make a selfless gesture of service to Man, international Man. She wrote to Williams in Monroe asking if she could give him and the paper a hand for a few days. She arrived in North Carolina at the time the picketing had started and called Williams. He said yes.... she could help. There was work to be done right away.

So she was on the line there as the mob surged forward, a special object of their hate for her whiteness and her youth and the beauty of her selflessness. Some strapping racist haridan lunged at her, tearing at the neck of her dress to rip it off and expose her to shame. Her dress tore, someone spat full in her face. Forman, the Picket Captain, took her by the arm and put her in the front seat of Wilson's car. For a moment, the policemen in the vicinity were figuring to do the decent thing, waving Wilson on, to get out of there. But the real ruling power in Monroe took over, a small venomous man, the agent of the Ku Klux Klan, shrieking out his abysmal horror at this white girl getting into the car with "niggers".

The police hesitated and then were overborne with his commands. They reached into Wilson's car and attempted to drag the girl out. Wilson tried to get the escape vehicle under way; he was molested by a policeman on the driver's side. There was a scuffle so complex and confused that no one really remembers it in the proper sequence, during which a policeman saw a shotgun, unloaded, on the floor in the back. He snatched it up and excitedly handed it to a white man standing close by. The white man, without a split-second pause, swung the gun high above his head and brought it down onto the skull of James Forman, Picket Captain. And as his blood streamed out of the wound, the mob found their release and swarmed forward against all the pickets, kicking and pounding them in a madness more terrible than the blows themselves.

When a mob like this closes-in, in a Southern town, nobody knows what the end will be. A young Negro boy, Albert Rorie, saw the awful motion and ran from the Courthouse Square to Newtown. This is a hard run, past the City Hall, the police station and then over a bridge spanning some railroad tracks; the bridge being the no-man's land between black and white in Monroe, North Carolina, and then into the Negro section, spreading the alarm like Paul Revere . . . not only that the Freedom Riders were being beaten to death by the mob in front of the courthouse, but that the mob would later sweep down into Newtown in all their frenzy.

Rorie was speaking out of his own blood knowledge. It had all happened before to his father and grandfathers, to his color, his race. No exaggeration he could think of that day in warning of trouble to come could be worse than what had actually happened to his people for generations in the Carolinas and the deep South. Klansmen and mobs had always ridden and run in the night proudly, in cold blood, and carrying the flag of the Confederacy before them, to terrify, to assault, to burn, whip and lynch the poor who have none to help them . . . who are defenseless.

But the Negroes in Monroe are different. They are poor but they are not precisely defenseless. They had guns and they went quickly into their houses to get them and to prepare to use them. They began to press close to the border of the white town in an attempt to rescue the trapped Freedom Riders. Sporadic firing began to break out between them and the Monroe police. One officer, J.W. Rushing, claimed to be hit in the leg. Later, Albert Rorie,

Newtown's Paul Revere, was arrested and charged with assault to kill. He was convicted of this crime, although no weapon was found on him, as testified to by an officer at his trial, nor was any evidence shown there that the officer had been injured, no X-ray was offered, no doctor testified, no ballistic tests were submitted, no fingerprints adduced.

The confusion was now so great, and the police with the mob pushing at their backs so menacing, that the Negro rescue party had to drop back to the streets of Newtown. The pickets, still in Courthouse Square, were being kicked around and trampled like a broken string of beads. James Forman, the Picket Captain, holding his bleeding head, was making a superhuman effort to gather them up, this pitiful debris of the picket line, being smashed by tides of sub-human fury against walls of sub-human hate. He demanded that the police take them into the station for protection. Some 40 people began to accumulate there, throwing themselves on the mercy of the Monroe officials.

Woodrow Wilson, a perfect model for a black Samson, who could have smote the little men dragging him from his car, hip and thigh, was asked by Forman to adopt non-resistance. Reluctantly, he did this, although as an active member of Williams' Defense Squad, he had never taken the Non-Resistant's Oath. He was led off in handcuffs with the required meekness of posture. He scarcely raised a finger or opened his mouth but he was booked, jailed, tried and sentenced to two years in prison for inciting to riot despite his agonizing suppression of his inalienable right of resistance to mob tyranny. This sentence was suspended on the condition he has no more truck with Freedom Riders, or freedom talk.

In the police station, Negroes, bruised and bleeding, were brought in and booked with such roughness of handling and threat that Forman became uneasy about his peaceful pickets remaining there. By this time, the mob was around the police station where the prisoners were, blocking traffic and giving the appearance of a lynch mob that might seize the prisoners. Forman asked the Police Captain if he could call four taxis to get them back to their quarters in Newtown. The Captain told him to wait a little longer until things quieted down. It was an ominous wait with much dire muttering among the police, and then a most portentous-seeming dialogue between Chief Mauney and the agent of the Ku Klux Klan. The Chief was overheard saying to him, "It will take about half an hour to arrange", and when that time came, a policeman came

over to the pickets and put them all under arrest. They were then put in police cars and carried off to the jail

Then the drama shifted, most tragically, to the community of Newtown, where the Negro people, many of them possessing arms, as permitted by the North Carolina laws, were awaiting news from the white town which had become a concentration camp, perhaps a slaughter house, for their sons and friends. Their restlessness and anger, their anticipation of the mindless wrath to come, was deeper and more meaningful than it would have been in other communities. Robert Williams lived there and had driven his personality and his program deep into their group consciousness. It was Williams who had transformed this ordinary, harassed Negro ghetto into a force which had met the white terror of the Klan head-on; and this in a town which was virtually the Klan headquarters.

After this transformation, they had sustained a completely indigenous and militant resistance movement, which had for years, at bitter personal sacrifice, stood off attempts from all levels of the ruling apparatus to crush it out. In spite of this, or because of this, their achievement of unity and strength had remained unknown to the country at large. Their faces and names, with one exception, did not exist in the consciousness of the American people. Their acts of courage and dignity (black men daring to shoot back at white mob oppression), had passed into oblivion without causing the slightest stirring in the conscience of the self-proclaimed Liberal North.

As they stood there in the gap, awaiting the assault in which they knew that their lives might have to be given up in self-defense, they realized that they were in dubious battle; that their position of resistant strength was badly eroded. They felt that the racists would never have dared to attack the picket lines, or mount the coming attack on Newtown itself if it had not been stated in the past week that the Monroe Negro community had abandoned their rifle defense squad in favor of non-violence.

Awareness, regret, gnawing doubts about this provoked a strong spirit of reckless anger in the Newtown citizens; self-anger that they had given up a strong position which apparently had worked, for one which that day revealed that nothing had changed in the attitudes of their white racist enemies . . . that they were again thought of as helpless victims, helpless prey, and that the ground that they had obviously lost might never again be regained.

* * * * *

Robert Williams, somehow, still has the heft of a genuine prophet when he is balanced off against his time and the ambiguities that surround him. He is in Cuba now, a political refugee, and it is perhaps a disservice to those within the immediate grasp of the courts and the law to make him a central figure in the Monroe tragedy. But it would be evasive and dishonest not to discuss him. The attitudes and the torments that gripped the crowd in the streets of Newtown as they waited in vain for news of what was happening to the victims, on the mob around the courthouse, were so shaped by him that they must be accounted for.

Williams had been in the Marines. He had come back to Monroe, the place of his birth, to get that shock of recognition that comes so powerfully to Negroes returning to the South after being in the service. There is a recognition that municipal government there is a military one along the lines of troops occupying and controlling an enemy or colonial people. It is easy, once the military posture has been drilled into a man, to understand that the Southern policeman is more a soldier, operating under forms of law so illogical and capriciously personal that they are an insult to any honest legal intelligence.

Just as slavery was a state of war, segregation is. Courts and due process merely validate police action based on brute force. When a white claims injury from a Negro, he does not go before the Grand Jury to give testimony and make his complaint. A police officer usually does this. Trial juries are not asked by the prosecution to make judgment on the basis of the physical evidence submitted in open court but on the basis of the information given by the police officer who states the case for the prosecution. In this way, it is the police power itself that is always on trial in the courts, and naturally, has to be upheld. The policeman does not present the evidence...he *is* the evidence, its total personification. To go against his word is dangerous, even treasonable to the white community.

Williams, rightly angered by this, cast around for some elementary form of resistance to it ... some way of bearing witness to it. The first thing to do is talk about it, for if it is never admitted, as it never has been by the white South, then it cannot be corrected. The N.A.A.C.P., for all its shortcomings, has carried the enormous burden of Negro wrongs on its back for many years and been incessantly and repetitively vocal about it. To call local and perhaps national attention to the plight of a segregated town in what has always been regarded as the most liberal Southern state, North Carolina, Williams re-formed a defunct branch of the

N.A.A.C.P.; at first trying to get the more successful Negroes to function with him, and failing that, was able to recruit the domestic workers and the under-employed and underpaid which are the real masses of the region.

Monroe, North Carolina, with a present population of some 12,000, has been a railroad town since 1860. The Negro population were employed in this business but with the collapse of mass transportation all over the country, they were thrown out of work. Industrial developments were enticed in from the North and forced to sign contracts barring Negroes from any jobs above menials. There are no unions in Union County, of which Monroe is the shire town. Government development funds have been poured in and whites, from as far away as Texas, imported and trained for government supported jobs. Local Negroes were not employed and the racial employment pattern, so dear to the white South, has been faithfully preserved.

With the dues-paying membership almost totally made up of domestics and part-time workers, Williams was able to create a strong and ethically responsive branch of the N.A.A.C.P. He happens to be a poet, as, oddly enough, were the other American prophets, Garrison, John Quincy Adams, Whittier, Thoreau, and Emerson. Using his exuberant creativity as a wedge, he was able to obtain the use of the Monroe Public Library for himself and his talent, and then parlay this into its desegregation. This first victory was very important to Williams. A small, interracial Unitarian Fellowship backed him in this move. He joined it and there found a friendly, even brotherly response to his talent and his ideas.

His next task was tougher; to desegregate the local swimming pool, built and operated by government funds. Here he ran into one of the basic white Southern insanities; that proximity to Negroes in water is a major taboo. He decided to allow for this, merely asking the city officials that the pool be set aside for one day a week for Negro children. This was turned down with the argument that they would have to drain the pool directly after and fill it with clean water, and this would be too expensive. This was the final answer and a very exacerbating one to the Negroes of Monroe. Two of their children had just been drowned swimming in a fast creek nearby, the only source of refreshment in the summer heat. Memories of this was one of the elements turning the armed Negroes in the streets of Newtown the Sunday afternoon of August 27, 1961, into a mob as reckless and explosive as the one surging around the courthouse.

Pecksniffian liberals in the North, resting after the desegregation decision of 1954, do not seem to realize that white Southern resistance to it is not a matter of court cases and county legalities. It is hard, bloody and war-like. The delays set up by the "all deliberate speed" absurdity allowed the Klan to revive itself massively as a direct action and terror group. It had already infiltrated deeply into local police departments. Police Chief Mauney of Monroe has been repeatedly accused of being a member of the Klan and has never been troubled enough by it to deny it.

When the regenerated N.A.A.C.P. branch, under the leadership of Williams and another remarkable young Negro leader, Doctor Albert Perry, began to press for desegregation, or, in the swimming pool matter, for some elementary justice and humanity, the Klan began its classic role of terror. Cars have replaced horses but the tactics are as childish as ever. Hooded men in white robes, purchased from the Klan's official supplier, a famous mail-order house in Saint Louis, sitting in cars with the dome lights on, with engines racing and horns blowing, rode through the streets of Newtown, shooting into the windows of homes, grills, barber shops, poolrooms and stores. Just to think about it gives one the old sick doubt in the pit of the stomach that man himself is ever going to get out of the muck and filth of his own complacent bestiality.

This had always worked before; for a hundred years men with guns and the right to use them at will, had lorded it over people without them and no rights at all. The Klan rode in Monroe, North Carolina in 1867, and by its incessant and officially winked-at brutality, had been able to reverse the agony and blood of the victory at Appomattox and put a whole people back into a bondage, by terror and abuse, even more humiliating than the legal one . . . the one the Emancipation Proclamation was supposed to erase. A public policy of violent threat followed by violent reprisal had worked in Nazi Germany; it was working now in South Africa. For those who want separation of the races, there has never been a better tactic.

Because of the supra-official status of the Klan in Southern life, the laws concerning the carrying and the shooting off of weapons of death are loosely drawn. Williams decided to take advantage of this contradiction. He wrote away to the National Rifle Association in Washington, D.C. for a rifle club charter. He explained that he was a Marine veteran and had organized a group of ex-service men committed to the active preservation of their own, and their country's freedom. This is true, of course, in every respect. The charter was sent with alacrity as it always is to any

group making such a request, and no one would have given it a second thought if it had been a group of Southern white men.

I don't suppose that the Rifle Association has received one protest from pacifist, or any other humanitarian groups, in all its years of existence over its encouragement of veterans, to take up arms again and fire them off regularly at the symbolic foe represented by the official targets. But a very curious thing happens, even to liberals, at the thought of a black man having arms in his possession. Their deep and pervading sense of racial guilt suggests to them, fearfully, that the black man has an accumulated moral justification to use them, and probably will.

When it became known that Williams had received such a charter, and had already organized and was thus about to legitimately arm a group of Negro veterans, the white liberals who had supported him as a poet, rejected him as a warrior and ran for cover. There were some few notable exceptions to this, and the police harassment these real patriots underwent, is nearly incredible. All the prophetic qualities the white liberals recognized in Williams, went whirling over the dam of their own racist fears; they practiced, unconsciously, the same sort of denial of basic rights for which they held the White Citizens Council and the Klan in such contempt. This form of national sickness was diagnosed long ago, in 1852, by the greatest of all pacifists and non-resistants, William Lloyd Garrison, in a review of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in the *Liberator* of March 26th, that year.

"We are curious to know whether Mrs. Stowe is a believer in the duty of non-resistance for the white man, under all possible outrage and peril, as well as for the black man: whether she is for self-defense on her own part, or that of her husband, or friends or country in case of malignant assault, or whether she impartially disarms all mankind in the name of Christ, be the suffering and danger what it may. That all the slaves of the South ought, if smitten on the one cheek, to turn the other also, to repudiate all carnal weapons, wait for a peaceful deliverance and abstain from all insurrectionary movements is everywhere taken for granted, because **THE VICTIMS ARE BLACK**. *They* cannot be animated by a Christian spirit and yet return blow for blow, or conspire for the destruction of their oppressors. *They* are required by the Bible to put away wrath, to suffer all conceivable outrage without resistance. None of their advocates may seek to inspire *them* to imitate the example of the Greeks, the Poles, the Hungarians, our revolutionary fathers, for such teaching would evince a most unchristian and bloodthirsty disposition. How is this to be reconciled? Is

there one law of submission and non-resistance for the black man, and another law of rebellion and conflict for the white man?"

Williams understood, as Garrison before him, that to disarm the Negro in the face of the enemies' outrage and assault is simple racism, unless the same pious advocate calls for the disarmament of every group and government in the world in the face of every conceivable threat to their existence and practice simple non-resistance to coercive forms in every phase of his own daily life.

It was sad for Williams and everyone else involved, I assume, to come to the end of the pleasant integrated relationships of the Unitarian Fellowship, but the saddest note struck here is when the 50 or 60 black men of Monroe who made up the Rifle Club, gazed at the backs of the retreating white liberals and realized that they did not need them anymore. Sad for the whites, I mean, everywhere.

It is sad because many white Americans are troubled to the point of desperation by this tragic separation. Their consciences are badly lacerated by this increasing alienation of people, one from the other. They realize that while it goes on, we are all not only half-citizens, but half-men and half-women, with our affectional qualities shut off from fulfillment with 20 million others by laws contrived and enforced against us all. And some white Americans are troubled with nightmare fears that the day of total liberation for the darker peoples of the world, so rapidly approaching, will be one of reckoning and revenge, and that they will follow our path in allocating all the fruits of victory according to the pigmentation of the skin.

Williams' association with the Unitarian Fellowship was the only redemptive factor which emerged for him when he returned to Monroe. Their desertion of him was catastrophic. It appears that these Unitarians only half understood the historical position of their denomination in respect to racial tyranny. If Theodore Parker is a Unitarian apostle, as they claim he is, and if their present faith exists in some semblance of his prophetic image, as they boast it does, then they should have known what Parker did under exactly similar circumstances in his own time, and done likewise.

When Theodore Parker was confronted with a threat to two Negro members of his congregation by white racists, he did not tell them to go and kneel on the steps of the church and grovel until the hard hearts of their tormentors were softened. Their names were William and Ellen Craft; they were fugitives, he could not recognize them as slaves. First of all, he took Ellen into his home and under his protection. And then, "I armed myself and put my house into a state of defense. For two weeks I wrote my ser-

mons with a sword in the open drawer under my inkstand and a pistol on the flap of the desk, loaded, ready, with a cap on the nipple. Commissioner Curtis said, 'A process is in the hands of the Marshall...in the execution of which he *might be called upon to break open dwelling houses and perhaps to take life by quelling resistance, actual or threatened.*' I was ready for him. I knew my rights".

Then Parker performed his ministerial office toward William Craft. "I inspected his weapons. His powder had a good kernel and he kept it dry. His pistols were of excellent proof, the barrels true and clean, the trigger went easy, the caps would not hang fire at the snap. I gave William a sword...and told him of his manly duty therewith if need be, to defend the life and liberty of Ellen."

This was in Boston, Massachusetts, and Parker was consciously acting against the law. How much more compelling is the duty of liberal whites to defend their associates in the Carolinas where the harassment of others is patently against the law. They may offer the excuse that conditions were enormously worse then, that it was slavery times and that the upheaval to come made the humanitarian acts of men like Parker, more virtuous, more justifiable.

But what are the present conditions in the South? The best reporter of the *New York Times* has described them, and nobody has really disputed the accuracy of his statements. "Every channel of communication, every medium of mutual interest, every reasoned approach, every inch of middle ground, has been fragmented by the emotional dynamite of racism, reinforced by the whip, the razor, the gun, the bomb, the knife, the torch, the mob, the police, and many branches of the state's apparatus."

No one claims that this bill of atrocities originates on the Negro side of the line. What are they supposed to do with all this bearing down on them, and the state apparatus ham-stringing them from offering legal and peaceful opposition? We cannot tell them what to do, but when they do make their choice and nobly dare to be free, we should know about it, and if it touches us deeply, or at all, we should help them...a tenth as much as they are helping themselves. And we must begin by realizing the enormity of the oppression...and the enormity and the longevity of their resistance to it...a century of resistance which is verified by every racist law, every physical exclusion, every beating, jailing, hanging and burning...for everyone of these punishments was brought on by some special act of Negro resistance to some form of racial tyranny.

Some people think that because this was mentioned in the *Times*, that it will soon be cleared away. As a people, we are childishly hopeful that exposure and discussion of a social wrong will cure it. Our sympathies are used up and appeased in the reading while the question of how to defend oneself against the reality of these intolerable conditions goes begging. Now we even have to argue whether the Negro has the *right*, not alone the duty, to defend themselves and their families. Whenever this question is raised, it is inevitably extended to the false premise that to give these people means of defense is to incite them to run amuck and kill as promiscuously as white Colonials kill Algerians. There is absolutely nothing in the historical record to support this. It is racist madness to even think of it. Everyone knows that the knife, the club, and the State's apparatus are now, and always have been, wielded by the white man against the black man...and never by the black.

"Action from principle," said Thoreau in *Civil Disobedience*, "The perception and performance of right, changes things and relations; it is essentially revolutionary and does not consist wholly of anything which was." Williams was getting ready to act, and changes were going to come. How many of the million teachers of rhetoric burying an embalmed Thoreau in students' minds will ever attempt to understand Williams and the Monroe incidents by the light of this luminous American classic, or know how the life of it is quickened and made whole by the actions of the black men of Monroe?

The Klan knew it could not hurt Williams enough without doing away with him altogether. But they felt Doctor Perry was vulnerable; so immensely popular, so young and so prosperous. He appeared to be Williams' second in command and perhaps the supplier of the sinews of war. He had married a Monroe girl and settled there to practice, building himself one of the finest houses for miles around; a long, low brick structure of fortress-like strength. He built it on the shifting sands of racial upheaval but he and the house are there to stay. His roots are locked in a struggle for which he is willing to give his very life. He is there now.

Observing the classic lines of the class struggle, Perry is the last person in the world to throw his lot in with Williams, as a professional, prosperous, and a Roman Catholic, but he did this without reservations of any kind. Perry's house, his practice, his prosperity and his religion made the Klan consider him a sitting duck and they began to threaten an attack on him in force. They

publicly announced and held a monstrous rally with the fires, the crosses, the robes, the booze. Several thousand racists were whipped into a froth of destructive hate by a Baptist preacher, who, after the way of his kind in the South, blessed the coming attack in the name of God, Mother and the Flag. At the end, the Benediction, I believe it is called, the Klansmen staggered into their cars, lit the dome lights, revved up the motors and started down the highway to Perry's house, that stupendous affront to the white man's status and home life.

The houses stand upon a knoll and can be plainly seen from a major highway, Route 74. It is a standing rebuke to the ineffectuality of the Klan's headquarters, not far off. Since one of the major humiliations of the oppression of the black citizens of the United States is that it is carried out so publicly, so shamelessly, at high noon in the streets, in public restaurants, in public schools, hospitals, and in the public press, everyone in Monroe knew what was going to happen that night.

The Monroe Chapter of the National Rifle Association met that same evening at Doctor Perry's. In carrying out the simulation of warfare which is the purpose of the organization, they had erected sandbag emplacements at various shielded and strategic points around the Perry house. They had closed off, with a huge naval chain, one of the entrances of the road passing it. When the long, lethal, cacophonous caravan drew near with its load of destruction and woe, the Rifle Club, returning the Klan shots, caught the invaders in a rain of enfilading fire. The first car was decisively hit. There was the harsh sound of breaking glass, an abrupt silence and then the agonizing grind of dozens of cars going into reverse and groaning backwards like some terminal prehistoric animal in the death throes which would bring its whole species into oblivion. No one knows yet what happened to the car zeroed in on that night. The incident was perfunctorily reported in the local press and mentioned in *Jet* magazine but it never got on the national wire service ticker tapes.

The Rifle Squad organized by Robert Williams had stopped the Klan in its tracks. The city fathers actually outlawed Klan motorcades through the town, whereas before, they had been escorted by police cars. It would seem that this tactic would have been widely praised and copied in other centers of Klan terror and control. But actually, it was suppressed as news. The *enemy*, the white racist Americans who were their neighbors, with whom they lived out their lives in constant proximity, whom they worked for, whose government they supported with their toil and their taxes,

and their lives on foreign fields of battle, turned to other forms of harassment, legal and economic, against the Negro people of Monroe, North Carolina.

* * * * *

The legal onslaught began with Doctor Perry, the local Vice-President of the N.A.A.C.P. being arrested a few weeks after the Klan had been fought to a standstill from his house. The charge was illegal abortion. The complainant was a white woman. It was a frame-up. The Grand Jury returning the indictment was composed solely of whites from a Klan community. The trial jury was of the same content. The woman making the complaint was the only witness. There was no medical evidence offered whatsoever. He was convicted. The expense of getting counsel was enormous. The Klan wanted to bleed Perry financially so that he would never again be able to assist the Rifle Squad, nor carry any longer, the fine house that was such a sharp stone in the white man's shoe. Perry appealed the conviction and it was reversed by the Supreme Court of North Carolina on the argument that Negroes were excluded from the juries. Action was started for a retrial.

Soon afterwards, the infamous Monroe "Kissing Case" took place. Two Negro children, boys of seven and nine, were picked up by the police on rape warrants, questioned without counsel by a judge in chambers and sentenced to serve in the State Reformatory for Negro boys until they were twenty-one. Their crimes were that the older boy, Hanover Thompson, had allowed a white girl, aged six, by the name of Sissy Marcus, to kiss him on the cheek. The younger boy, Fuzzy Simpson, had witnessed the interchange between Hanover and Sissy. This, the judge explained later to the famous civil rights attorney, Conrad Lynn, had caused "his morals to become seriously impaired and he needed a term for indefinite rehabilitation". This term, from seven to twenty-one, was a sentence of fourteen years.

Conrad Lynn, a New York attorney, was brought into the case after the boys had been locked up, and he fought tooth and nail to get them out. Lynn is the sort of man who stays on the battlefield after everyone else has given up. He is a Negro, a small man physically, but as strong as an oak root holding up a towering giant of the forest. He strides into Southern courtrooms, the ultimate Holy of Holies of that way of life, with an air of cold and smiling fury. The bullies and the hangers-on give way to him. The judge attends; the prosecutor watches him warily, almost openly

fearful. He rejects the old-shoe informality of the Southern trial ritual. He permits no one to call Negro witnesses by their first names, a form of degradation, but insists they be addressed as "Mister". He demands that every small technicality, every pettifoggish twist and turn of the legal maze be used in favor of his client...he draws from his arsenal every decision, judgment and precedent ever used before in behalf of civil liberty and the oppressed, and hurls it at the opposition. He bruises easily and the opposition treads lightly around him, as though he would go off like a bomb if jarred too roughly and bring down their obscene temples of injustice around their ears.

After he heard about the two small boys being locked up, he applied for a writ, in the name of Robert Williams, to review the causes of the detention of the children. Governor Luther Hodges, now Secretary of Commerce, appointed the State's Attorney General to adamantly oppose this application. At this hearing, the N.A.A.C.P. joined with Lynn in asking for a review. The position of the Attorney General of North Carolina was that the warrants for rape, the secret trial, and the manner and the length of imprisonment were the accepted way of dealing with Negro children in North Carolina. At last, protests from all over the world shamed the Governor into releasing them.

The awesome spectacle of the gigantic pyramid of the law pressing out the normal childhood of two small boys...the Chief Magistrate of North Carolina, the judges of the Superior Court, the warden and the guards of their prison, the judge of the Juvenile Court, the Monroe police sent out in squad cars to pick them up on warrants for rape, as they did, the holding of them overnight and incommunicado in the basement of the jail...all this towering super-structure of the State's apparatus, obscure for the observer some of the worst lacerations of this incident.

Their mothers did not know where they were. They went tearfully from house to house in Newtown, trying to find them, infecting the whole community with their anxieties and the hopelessness of their position. It was out of the question for them to go, as other American mothers would in like circumstances, to the Police Station and demand their co-operation in finding their lost children. The Police Station in Monroe, North Carolina, is always a place of trouble and woe for the Negro people. It never solves their problems; rather it creates and magnifies them. It is a place to be shunned, like some terrible quicksand, or a hidden crevasse which can plunge the unwary into unpredictable doom.

The next morning, Robert Williams got a call from the Mayor,

Fred Wilson, who told him the boys had been picked up on rape charges. As Williams listened in stupefaction, the Mayor told him that the white community was incensed over it and asked for his help in disposing of the matter. Williams said...what did they do? The Mayor said he did not rightly know. Williams said...then just let them go. But life is never this simple in a town where one group of citizens is the prey of the other. Wilson said that feeling in the white community was building to an alarming peak against the boys. The rumor was that the white child's father had loaded his shotgun and gone looking for the two little boys. It goes without saying that this rumor was firmly believed in Newtown; as all rumors of the whites going on the attack against them always are. There was another rumor that a group of extreme racist whites were looking for the boys' mothers to retaliate on them for the sins of their seven and nine-year-old sons. Of course, they believed this too in Newtown; it happened all the time. The mothers, 15-dollar-a-week domestic workers, fled in panic and dared not sleep in their own homes for a week.

It was six days before they saw their children, and this was at a segregated "trial" before which they were given a half-hour's notice, at which their children were not represented by counsel and were so terrified and shocked by their lonely incarceration in the jail basement that they stood tongue-tied and defenseless under the hammering of their official accusers. Here, the little boys, uncomprehending, their young eyes pools of hopeless despair, heard their child-lives reduced to penal incarceration until they had become, legally, men.

Williams had been informed of the trial by the mothers; had rushed down to the courthouse, arrived a little late and not been allowed to sit in on it. But the explosive force of his indignation shattered the press blackout and the case became public knowledge and public shame in the country, and later, all over the world.

But again, the focus should shift back to the mothers and the community which has to suffer these things to be done to their children. In a period of months, the mothers saw their children once, being sentenced while they stood mute, for the duration of their natural childhood; the second time, at a futile court hearing in which their sons were kept cruelly out of their line of sight and touch by two huge deputy sheriffs wearing pearl-handled revolvers. As the deadening sense of the futility of the legal effort grew in the courtroom, and with this the realization that the mothers again

would not be able to so much as touch their children, an observer from the N.A.A.C.P. broke down in tears and had to be escorted to the corridor.

It was an English newspaper woman named Joyce Egginton, from the *London Observer*, who finally brought the mothers and children together against all the divisive power of the State of North Carolina. This took plots and stratagems. She had to pose as a social worker and carry a camera into the Reformatory, hidden in the bottom of a basket of fruit. She told the authorities she wanted to bring the children and their mothers together at last. They assented. The mother of seven-year-old Fuzzy Simpson knelt sobbingly on the floor and her lost little boy ran into her arms and Joyce Egginton took a picture. It appeared on the front page of the *London Observer*, December 16, 1958. The caption beneath it was simply, "WHY?"

The piling up of these wrongs against a defenseless people has a Kafka-like quality about it. Why indeed? Why should the State of North Carolina wage such a relentless and high level war against these children and two 15 dollar-a-week domestic workers? Are they against home and mother? Are they anxious for the newspaper readers of London, England to know that the affectional encounters of children in North Carolina are as rigidly policed as in South Africa? Do they want indignation stirred against these gross contradictions of what they say American freedom means, so that hostile demonstrations break out against North Carolina justice in France, Italy, Scandinavia, Belgium, China, Brazil, Canada and Holland? It made Robert Williams, as spokesman for the lost, imprisoned children, a world figure.

When the outbreak of student demonstrations against segregation rose to a climax in 1960, some students of Johnson C. Smith College in Charlotte, North Carolina, asked Williams to lead them in sitting-in at Jones' Drug Store in Monroe. With nine students, he occupied a stool there, instead of standing up in the back, the accepted position of the Negro customer. No threats of violence were used or charged. The proprietor refused service; they sat about 15 minutes and then walked out. As Williams stood on a nearby street corner, discussing further action, he was arrested on a charge of criminal trespass. He was convicted of this in the law court, then appealed to the Superior Court which confirmed the sentence and Williams sought a reversal in the Supreme Court of North Carolina. His argument was that police enforcement of the trespass statute constituted state action depriving the appellant of the equal protection of the law under the 14th Amendment.

This was rejected by the North Carolina Supreme Court and Williams is now seeking *certiorari* in the U.S. Supreme Court.

In Williams' view, this episode is highly unique and important to the segregation struggle. In an interview in Chicago, February, 1961, he made the following points: "There was less violence in the Monroe sit-in than any other sit-in in the United States. This is because we showed the willingness to defend ourselves. We didn't appear on the streets of Monroe as beggars depending on the charity and generosity of the white supremists. We appeared as people with strength. And it was to the mutual advantage of all parties concerned that peaceful relations be maintained. For that reason we had less violence. But this is the sort of thing that the supporters of non-violence never tell. In other communities there were Negroes who had their skulls fractured. But not a single impolite word was passed. This all means that we've had less violence because we've shown the willingness and the readiness to fight; because of this fact, we've not had to fight; there's been no cause to fight. And we believe that this is a deterrent against violence."

It was true that the presence of the Rifle Club prevented reprisals on the free forms of protest that Williams was carrying on, in his little paper *The Crusader*, and by the Negro community as a whole. But this had little effect on the subtler and more awful form of violence represented by the courts themselves. Thoreau understood this. "We preserve the so-called peace of our community by deeds of petty violence every day. Look at the policeman's billy and handcuffs. Look at the jail! Look at the gallows!" The awful punishing powers of the courts as demonstrated in the "Kissing Case", began to work its way like a virus into the sensibilities of the Newtown community.

Williams went one day to the local court for a clear look at procedures and processes from the standpoint of the black man. He saw, in stately sequence, all the essential fraudulence of the legal process when it has no objectivity, and is, therefore, not just. When the courts are used to palliate, to explain away crime, making social situations which should be unbearable, to be borne because the brute facts are never met, head on.

He saw a white man escaping a Grand Jury indictment in the face of the brute facts that this man had kicked a Negro chambermaid down four flights of stairs because she had made a clatter with her wash pail when he was trying to sleep...kicked and cuffed her down the stairs and across the landings so roughly that she had to remain in the hospital several months. He saw an epileptic

Negro given two to five years for attempted rape for touching the wrist of a white woman during an argument over a tractor. He heard a white woman testify that she saw a white man come into a cornfield, drunk, and attempt to rape a Negro woman eight months pregnant, in her presence. Williams heard the white jury acquit the assaulter without hardly stirring in their seats. He saw, transpiring before his eyes, acts of atrocity which in other lands, other times and even in this land, moved men to the breaking point.

And he emerged from this demonstration at his breaking point, filled with the bile and wrath of the outraged prophet. What could his Rifle Club do about this profound injustice? Absolutely nothing! They could not storm the courthouse and cry out for equal justice under the law, or for the removal of false judges, as our founding fathers did in Massachusetts, before and after the Revolution. Only the white racists can storm courthouses and jails with impunity and then only if it is to drag out helpless Negroes and shoot them in the head as they did Mack Parker in Mississippi.

The hopelessness of the Negroes' segregation from justice itself was so overwhelmingly clear to Williams, that when a wire service reporter approached him, warily, but occupationally, for Williams is a marvelous agitator and comes up with newsworthy quotes on all occasions, and asked him what he thought of the session, Williams replied in words of fire and doom. "This court has proved that Negroes cannot receive justice from the courts. They must convict their attackers on the spot. They must meet violence with violence!"

This statement was widely scattered on the news wires and Williams was immediately tainted with the advocacy of the same sort of mindless cruelty as the Southern whites, the taking up of arms in a spirit of irrational, indiscriminating, brute force. People who should have known better ignored the sense of the quotes... that the Negroes should "convict their attackers"...since the courts, out of prejudice or fear, obviously would not. He was saying no more than another American poet, Whitman, did in his introduction to the 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass*.

"When servility by town or state or the Federal Government or any oppression on a large scale or small scale can be tried on without its own punishment following duly after in exact proportion against the smallest chance of escape...then only shall the instinct of liberty be discharged from that part of the earth."

Once Williams had been successfully smeared as the advocate of vindictive violence, the front pages and the T.V. screens resumed their favorite visible image of the desegregation move-

ment...Negroes on their knees praying for mercy, Negroes being hauled off to prison soulfully singing of their undiminished love for their oppressors, Negroes unresisting, being thrown through the air like bundles of rags by white thugs while the local police stand by with complacent smiles. There was some news of Williams, but it was all bad, for him, for his people. Those who nobly dared to be free were forgotten. The national N.A.A.C.P. suspended Williams for his statement but he was later re-elected President of the Monroe branch.

In the words of a trained social worker highly conversant with the situation at that time, "The Negroes in Monroe need help of all kinds very badly. The State government pretends the situation does not exist. Groups such as C.O.R.E., N.A.A.C.P., and the S.C.L.C., are staying away because they feel that the reputation for violence in that area may hurt their cause. The Negro community is under excessive pressure even for a Southern rural town. Health and welfare services are withheld in ratio to the defiance of the individual to the approved 'status' of the Negro as determined by the white in-group. Robert Williams was the militant Negro there and the white community seemed to go to any length to silence him. He did keep arms in his house and publicly announced this. He told me, and I believed him, that he did this in order to prevent attack upon his family and household by the whites. I believe he would have been killed if the white community in Monroe had not been afraid of Williams' arms."

This virtual obliteration of the Negroes of Monroe from the thoughts and sympathies of the liberal whites who were pouring money into those areas of the South where the struggle was purely non-violent and prayerful, must have bothered Williams. He must have blamed himself for this neglect. A demonstration based on non-violent techniques was tried at the segregated swimming pool. It was not effective and ground was lost. The Klan brought out their guns again and fired over the heads of the non-resistants. The local agent for General Motors tried to ram Williams' small car off the road. The police saw this; Williams demanded the agent's arrest for assault with intent to kill but the police only laughed at him. He sent in a report of this incident, as he did of all such infractions of the law, to the responsible North Carolina officials and the Federal Department of Justice. Nothing happened ...nothing was changed.

This grinding attrition, this forced suspension of the basic human impulse to fight back was becoming unbearable to everyone. A group of Freedom Riders decided to give Monroe a helping hand.

With their training and their advanced social techniques, it was thought some cleansing light, some publicity could be focused on the stifled Monroe situation. And so they came, and so the old white violence started up again in Courthouse Square. And Williams and the Rifle Squad, who had not relinquished their own convictions of self-defense, found themselves, that Sunday night of August 27, back where they had been when first they raised their guns and fired back at the Klan.

* * * * *

John Lowry, who was there, has written very movingly of what happened in the streets of Newtown when it was known that the Freedom Riders and the young men of the Monroe Non-Violent Action Committee were being carried off to jail. Lowry is twenty years old, a white lad from the North. He had just spent twenty-one days in the Mississippi penitentiary for a breach of peace, for demonstrating against racism. He went on from there to Monroe to take his place in the picket line on Courthouse Square. He is the embodiment of the only hope we whites have that the black people will ever forgive us for what we have done to them.

He says there were armed Negroes from miles around waiting there, mainly in front of Williams' house on Boyte Street. Almost every one of them believed that the pickets would be beaten to death overnight. There were anguished outcries that they should shoot their way across the bridge to the jail and free their people.

Lowry says he heard laughter in the midst of this anger and the projection of death. The people who were laughing had another projection, also lethal. They were saying that the white mob and the Klan, finding its lust for blood and pain unslaked by the removal of their scapegoats from the streets uptown, were forming a motorcade in the old Klan style, as if they had never learned a lesson in their lives.

They were laughing because they had never before felt as free as this, standing in their own streets with their own weapons in their hands. They were finally sweating the slaves out of themselves, destroying, before the eyes of one another, the age-old picture of Negro submissiveness and indecision which the whites had always wanted them to accept. Every gun carried the weight of its solemn commitment, their very presence there had the value of a declaration of principle. Jean-Paul Sartre writes of the exaltation of this mood when describing the attitude of the resistant

Frenchmen during the Nazi occupation....when they were saying NO to all that.

Williams was there on the porch, agonizingly conscious of the demands being made upon him for a solution of leadership and high courage. He stood watching the sun, hanging like a time bomb on the edge of the horizon. He knew, or he felt, that when it dropped the Klan would ride. No wonder it was an American Negro who wrote one of the most simply beautiful of the world's laments ... "I hate to see that evening sun go down".

When it did, and the enfolding dusk came on, he told them what they already knew, that soon the cars would wind their way in there, blowing their horns, shooting off their guns, and possibly, if the bloody incidents that had just taken place in the square had only whetted their appetites for a glut, there might be raping and killing in the old sick way all over again. Williams believes that one hundred years of permissive hatred and violence against the Negro has made the Southern whites absolutely impervious to the pain they bring to others. He believed them utterly insane and that no atrocious act in the whole human record of torture and affront is beyond their capabilities.

He made the point that the assault must be resisted defensively; that if it was only horn blowing and invective, to let them ride through, but if shots were fired, to have no qualms about returning them. He wanted, and still wants, the Monroe record to stay clean. He wants his policy of *people with strength* to prove itself correct.

"I believe that when oppressed people show a willingness to fight in formidable forces, the enemy, who is a moral weakling and a coward, is more willing to grant concessions and work for a respectable compromise. Psychologically, we must also consider that the racist whites consider themselves superior beings, therefore, they are not willing to exchange their superior lives for inferior ones. They are most vicious and violent when they can practice violence with impunity."

In the gathering darkness, the massed defenders of Newtown stood with touching shoulders in the street. The talk died off. There was none of the atmosphere of grim fun which comes during sit-ins and bus rides, the banter...the singing of "We Shall Overcome." It is time people in the North realize that most Southern Negroes are not greatly concerned about how they will drink their ice cream sodas, or where they will sit on the buses, but are thinking that a moment will come one of these days when they will have to give up their lives.

Someone yelled, "Here they come," and a black car came swinging into Boyte Street. Disregarding Williams' advice, the two hundred Negroes massed before it. Someone said it was the same car that had carried a huge sign reading, "IT'S OPEN SEASON ON COONS", the day before.

But it was soon obvious that this was the only car coming, there was no following caravan, no attack, and the occupants of this one were two funny white people, a Mrs. and Mr. Stegall. They were local sight-seers, the sort that clog fire lanes, that hang around to gape while the lives of accident victims ebb out on the littered pavements, silly clowns that stand on the sidewalk shouting to the suicide on the high ledge to jump and get it over with so they can get home to their television sets.

No other explanation of the Stegalls being there makes sense. They claim that they lost their way in an attempt to by-pass the continuing turbulence in town. But to get to Newtown, and Boyte Street, and Williams' house, they had to turn off a major highway leading straight out of town, and take a winding narrow road into the center of the Negro community.

Whatever their reason or excuse was, the enormously comic side of this anti-climax was not felt by the armed defenders. They had been braced for the onslaught of racist violence coming out of chaos and the dark; now they wanted it. Their first feeling was that the Stegalls were reconnoitering, seeing if Williams had been left unguarded, and if the mass arrests in town, and the complications expected from the Negroes defensively returning the fire directed indiscriminately at them from the white side of the railroad tracks, had caused the members of the Rifle Squad to withdraw from further police harassment. There were other theories; that the Stegalls had strayed from the main body of invaders... many hateful theories, all operating against the Stegalls. Some of the men, clutching their guns, ran to the end of the street, hoping, almost, that the rest of the cars would come along so they could all go down in a Gotterdammerung of fire and blood.

The Stegalls were taken out of their car and brought into Williams' yard. It was inevitable that Williams would have to bear the entire burden of this incident, so comic in its essence, so unbearably tragic in its result. When Williams first saw this white-faced, slack-jawed couple, trembling with fear, feeling for the first time in their lives how it is to be helpless among masses of angry people who hate your very guts because of your color, he turned his back in disgust and walked away. They came after him, pleading mutely for him to save them, forcing him from his role as a leader bringing his people onto an unprecedented level of resist-

ance, into becoming a baby-sitter for two white clowns of disaster-chasers.

Williams could have walked away, washed his hands of the whole situation. A lesser man would have done this, for if anything had happened to the Stegalls that day on the streets of Newtown, the whole Negro community would have been willing to stand trial for it. When the door slammed on the Stegalls' car, they heard the prison doors slam on the young lives of Hanover and Fuzzy, and the cries of their poor mothers, they remembered the swimming pool denied, and the two children killed by the fast water of the creek. They remembered the chambermaid kicked down stairs, the woman raped in the cornfield, the epileptic jailed for an involuntary spasm of his hand...they may have heard reverberations of the words of their great prophet, W.E.B. DuBois, "This is the modern paradox before which the Puritan stands open-mouthed and mute. A group, a nation, or a race, commits rape, steals and destroys, yet no individual is guilty, no one is to blame, no one can be punished. The black world squirms beneath the feet of the white in impotent fury, or sullen hate".

Again we have conflicting stories as to the actual sequence of the motion. But it is agreed that the Stegalls were taken into Williams' house, that someone tied their hands, that Williams did have nominal custody of them, although even the Stegalls say that he had nothing to do with taking them out of their car. Mrs. Stegall said later, "Williams, he made out like he wanted to let us go. He acted like he wanted to be nice to us. But he said if he let us go, the mob outside would kill us".

Whether or not the Negro defenders in the street wanted to kill them or not can never be proved. But it is obvious the Stegalls were in great peril. Furthermore, it would be unrealistic and dishonest not to mention Bruce Stegall's assertion that Williams called Chief Mauney, saying he was holding them as hostages, and they would not be released until the Freedom Riders and the local boys held in jail and being beaten were let go. Williams flatly denies this.

The crucial question here is not the phone call, or even the anger of armed men against invaders, however comic. It is rather the crisis in leadership which overtook Williams. When an acknowledged leader is faced with some accident of history which calls for a decision on his part, he cannot ignore it or change it, he can only accelerate or delay its connection to the policies he has been impressing on his followers.

Williams' declaration of meeting violence with violence was

uppermost in the minds of the people in Boyte Street. The captives, while not overtly threatening, had a history of racist connection. Mrs. Stegall is said to be a member of the Klan Auxiliary. In an open, lawless war situation, such as this had become all over the South on the white man's side, it is impossible for the black man not to become infected with a desire for retaliation or hostage-taking. They are not saints. They are men. They bleed.

Williams, I believe, was as much a prisoner of this situation as the Stegalls. If he intended to save them, and I believe that this was his basic intent, it had to be done in such a way as to placate the righteous anger of his followers without deceiving them. He had to talk from two sides of his mouth. Williams says he is innocent of kidnapping and coercion. This is easy to believe once the man's character is thought through. He is an artist, a life-giver, not a life-taker. He is a proud, even arrogant, man, who wants people to love him, nevertheless, although not at the expense of easy capitulation to sentimentality. He is of the breed of prophets. He wants to transform other communities. He wants to move from moral peak to moral peak in such certainty of position that the mantle of his prophet-hood remains free of moral stain.

Regardless of what Williams is reported to have said, of what position he took toward the Negro defenders to assure them he would not be cravenly soft toward interlopers and spies, or what position he took toward the interlopers themselves, he handled this situation with brilliance and restraint. These two whites had blundered into a fiery furnace of racial hatred, heated up by a prolonged and one-sided incitement of black men who had agreed to defend themselves and their community at all costs.

He had plucked them from this fiery furnace and sent them out again after two hours, admittedly tense for everyone, without a scratch or a bruise on them, and the conviction in one of them at least, that he plainly wanted to help them. Now, for saving these people from great trouble, Williams is to be punished with life imprisonment by the State of North Carolina and the United States. He has been indicted for the crime of kidnapping. Attorney General Kennedy, when hearing of the incident, said, "On the basis of the facts reported to me, I would hope and expect that persons responsible for the violence, including the holding of a man and his wife as hostages, will be prosecuted to the full extent of the law".

On the basis of the facts reported to the Attorney General and every other American for generation after generation, it is clear that the persons responsible for the violence are the sick, sick Southern racists who control such a large share of our government

and who are pressing down upon us all the awful weight of their cruelty and barbarism toward other Americans whose rights are equal in every respect to their own. People who are in the Cabinet, who control the chairmanships of most Congressional Committees, who make laws, investigations, who range from Senators and Governors down to the Police Chief Mauneys and Howard Stacks. Who avowedly keep the dead hand of their racist past on all of our throats and whose racist principles are scarcely distinguishable from the war criminals tried at Nuremberg. If it were required, simply, that all office-holders in these United States who give their voices and their votes to support arbitrary police power and for the enforcement of racist laws should resign, the whole Southern power structure and much of the national government would fall into absolute chaos.

Elements of this racist power structure began to move in on Williams and the Newtown defenders with the military precision of an attack upon an enemy citadel. Williams, after seeing that the Stegalls were safe, decided he had to leave with his own family. The wisdom of this was quickly proven by an F.B.I. "Wanted" bulletin circulated for his capture. This man, having saved two whites from the anger of his own people, and accompanied by his wife and children, is described in the jargon used for a careful of drunken, homicidal bank robbers, careening down a road with Tommy guns blazing out of every window. He is explosively referred to as "heavily armed" and "extremely dangerous" and as a "schizophrenic". Visible even now in post offices all over the country, it seems like an open invitation for trigger-happy policemen to shoot first and ask questions later.

The same people who criticized Williams for his militancy now say he should have stayed for a round of North Carolina justice. Yet, according to this circular, this man, carrying the blessing, the respect, love, and hopes of a considerable number of Americans, could be shot down at sight as extremely dangerous in Ohio, Vermont, New York, Maine, or wherever it was that the revived Underground Railroad took him to his freedom. If that could have happened up here, what were his prospects for survival in a town convulsed by a race war, in a state of havoc and hysteria, and in the custody of a police chief who threatened to have Williams hanging in Courthouse Square within 30 minutes? In the F.B.I. circulars, justifications have to be offered that he is armed, dangerous and schizophrenic, but in Monroe, North Carolina, just being black is enough.

* * * * *

The raging fury of the whites went on and on. John Lowry, who had driven the car of the Stegalls from the middle of the road to the curb, was indicted for kidnapping on the same "True Bill" as Williams, although this was his sole connection with the incident. Two Negro members of the Monroe Non-Violent Action Committee, its president, Richard Crowder, 19, and Harold Reape, 17, were also indicted because they went to Williams' house late Sunday night, and long after he had left, out of curiosity. Mrs. Mae Mallory, a guest at Williams' house, who was no more a part of this complex incident than any other Negro prepared to defend Newtown from racist onslaughts that day, and who has no qualms about expressing her hatred of the Klan and all its works, was also indicted, pursued and hunted down in Ohio.

The fanaticism of white reprisal became more tangled, crazy and complex. The kidnapping indictments were handed down by a Grand Jury hastily convened the next day. The Stegalls did not appear before them, and all the evidence was given by one policeman. Attorney Lynn was told recently in court that no notes were taken of the Grand Jury session in which these crucial charges were made. Richard Crowder, Harold Reape, and John Lowry, were picked up and jailed on kidnapping warrants. Conrad Lynn had to go down to Monroe from New York and institute *Habeas Corpus* proceedings in order to have bail set and routine clarifications made of the charges against the boys.

Bail was set for Richard Crowder of \$15,000 and at \$10,000 each for Reape and Lowry. The trial was scheduled for October 29. On October 23, the Committee to Aid the Monroe Defendants posted \$15,000 in cash, the biggest bail the Union County Clerk of Courts had received in the 20 years he had occupied this office. Frantic efforts were made by the newly-formed C.A.M.D. to get money for the release of the other boys. The trial on October 29 was put off on the insistence of the prosecution that Mae Mallory, fighting extradition from Ohio, be present. However, the lawyers for C.A.M.D. were able to do some horse-swapping here and succeeded in having the total bail of \$35,000 reduced to \$15,000 and the other two boys were released on the bond posted for Crowder.

The trial was rescheduled for February, put off again at the pleasure of the prosecution, scheduled for May, put off then, scheduled for August, put off then...so that these three boys, out on bail, have dragged around this accusation of criminality like a ball and chain for over a year. What does the State of North Carolina care for the Sixth Amendment to the Constitution, which says, "In all criminal prosecutions the accused shall enjoy the right to a speedy and public trial"...or Article Eight, which says,

"Excessive bail shall not be required, nor cruel and unusual punishment inflicted".

Is it not a cruel and unusual punishment to keep a life sentence hanging over the heads of these boys for over a year? It will certainly not help them in establishing careers for themselves. To most people, this constant putting off of the trial is proof that they are innocent, and that the State does not dare expose its own hideous guilt in indicting them in the first place, to the open court! Yet the State of North Carolina is allowed to keep its heavy hand on the very marrow of their lives, so that through a whole summer and winter, and now through summer and winter again, they have to remain in the awful purgatory of accused persons unable to clear themselves.

Richard Crowder and Harold Reape have not had a job since their 64 days in jail. They are constantly threatened with death by the white racists of Monroe, so that they must not appear on the streets alone. But talk to these boys and they will ask you when the Freedom Riders are coming back again; when they can join in further demonstrations.

John Lowry, back North, is in a similar plight. He is about to be married, a condemned man planning a happy honeymoon...condemned, I say, for there is no doubt in anyone's mind that when the case is allowed to come to trial, that any Monroe jury of whites will find them guilty. If there is money enough for bail and a whole series of appeals in the coffers of the Committee to Aid the Monroe Defendants, he may be able to live with his wife and be her love, but what if there is not enough money for this. If C.A.M.D. cannot save them, nobody will save them.

The Monroe court feels it needs the testimony of Mae Mallory to keep the prosecution from appearing utterly farcial. It is claimed Mae Mallory made awful threats to the Stegalls. John Lowry says the wife of a Monroe minister came running out of her house as the Freedom Riders were returning the night before the assault on their lives, and tried to stab several of them with a butcher knife, shouting that she wanted to kill them.

This woman is now safe at home, says her prayers and sleeps in her own bed every night. Mae Mallory is held without bail in an Ohio prison, fighting extradition to Monroe, because she feels, as everyone admits, that she cannot get a fair trial there. It does not really matter what she said, or what she did...she could have been meek as a lamb, instead of the magnificent fighter that she is...and still be in inescapable danger of conviction, for she is *black*, and if she had said what she said, and did what she is supposed to have done for the *white* people of Monroe, she would not be an

escaped felon, but a local heroine.

Robert Williams, now in exile, would have been highly commended, if he, as a white man, had managed to talk an angry mob out of harming captives, fallen, by their own stupidity, into their hands, at a time of unbearable exacerbation and threat for this mob. Instead, by a classic turn of fate, the dedicated leader is removed from his people and destroyed by an unpredictable accident, some private flaw of softness and goodness in himself. Instead, he finds he is fulfilling his own prophecy, made in February, 1961, "There's a tendency in this country to penalize or punish outspoken militant Negroes. This is a matter of security and tradition. There is a possibility of reprisal; when an Afro-American speaks out, he becomes a target of abuse."

Doctor Albert Perry, who did not figure in the so-called kidnapping incident, has been tried twice on the same charges since he joined with Williams in the Monroe movement. He served a jail sentence and was then freed on the condition that he could not practice medicine in Union County, where his home is, and where his friends and patients live. He is fully accredited to take human lives in his professional hands in Charlotte, several miles away, but the minute he crosses the county line, he becomes a criminal practitioner, segregated from his profession. If he saw a man, white or black, bleeding to death on the streets of Monroe, he could not staunch his wound without becoming a felon again, guilty of practicing medicine without a license.

This shows us what the true purposes and resources of the courts of law are in the South; instruments to be manipulated for retaliation and revenge. Government-printed reports of the Civil Rights Commission affirm over and over again that in the enforcement of racist laws, "Judges seem to be influenced by right-wing terroristic and subversive organizations like the Ku Klux Klan... seem to condone the suborning and intimidation of persons who might be able to aid Negro litigants as witnesses....fundamental and essential rights of human beings are in constant danger of violation under the color of law and under the guise of justice".

Yet the liberals who read these documents with avid loathing and compulsion remain inert, actually in a state of moral paralysis, in the face of them. They never seem to ask themselves how far their own responsibility goes for this situation, where their own guilt lies, whether as citizens and men they can keep on condoning a structure of oppression to which they give tax support. They never seem to cry out as Thoreau did under exactly similar circumstance, "Are laws to be enforced simply because they are made? Or declared by any number of men to be good, if they are

not good? Is there any necessity for man's being a tool to perform a deed of which his better nature disapproves? What right have you to enter into a compact with yourself that you will do thus or so, against the light within you?...the law will never make man free; it is men who have got to make the law free!"

In a truly democratic society, we would all rise in our wrath and cry out, *enough, enough, enough of this wicked revenge! The Stegalls had a bad two hours, but they went free, unhurt, and this unceasing and procrastinating torture of five people is legal sadism. Quash the cases and let Williams come home. He is more useful here taking the motes from our eyes than in Cuba. And free these boys, forsworn non-resistants, from the prisons without bars that they are living in, to the denial of their rightful growth as men, lovers, fathers, and the denial of that citizenship for which they have already revealed the highest qualifications of courage and self-sacrifice, keeping the law when the government breaks it.*

Granted that much of the inertia comes from the utter corruption and hopelessness of the picture; it is too much, there seems to be no end or beginning, no place to take hold of it, this compounded madness of a hundred years. Why, they ask, is Monroe any different, or any more troubled than any other town in the South? Why should we help them?

The Negro people of Monroe, North Carolina, have said, and acted out, something vastly different in the desegregation movement. They have regenerated it. They are fighting on their feet, helping themselves. This is not the only way to do it but doing it this way somehow transforms the whole struggle. The English girl, Constance Lever, whose presence on the picket line ignited the tumultuous incident of August 27, 1961, put it with wonderment. First, that white people coming to help them "were completely accepted into the community with no reserve, no false shame, or false admiration. We felt as if we had lived there all our lives".

The other thing was; "They had a self-respect and pride that I'd never met in any other group of people. They weren't afraid to look anyone in the eye, to answer the Police Chief back, the Head of the Klan...whoever it might be. I saw Brown Massey, a boy of 15, beaten so he could hardly walk, hanging onto the wall of the police station for support. A policeman said to him in an insulting tone, 'You, boy, go and sit over there.' Brown Massey pulled himself up with an effort and said, 'You don't tell me what to do'."

Only someone who has walked into Newtown, as I did, with the community seething with anger over the shooting, in two successive weekends, of Negroes by white men, can understand the

transcendent quality of its people. Late Saturday night, June 30, 1962, James Poston, a Negro, was passing through the No Man's Land where the white country edges against the black. He was shot and seriously wounded as a "prowler" by a white man who was not even booked for this outrage. Typically, it was the wounded and bleeding Poston who was arrested and jailed. On Saturday, late, June 7, 1962, Roscoe Funderburk, Negro, father of five children, passing again through No Man's Land, was shot dead through the back of the head by a 20-year-old white man, also because he was a "prowler". The killer has since been acquitted of a second-degree murder charge.

No one in the Negro community ever finds out what really happens in these cases. The press prints two or three paragraphs which garble and conceal more than they tell and drop them in the next edition. To go to the Monroe Police Department and ask what they have on the blotter is futile and even dangerous. All they can really do to find out what has happened to their neighbor, and what may be in store for themselves, is to go quietly to the morgue and see where the bullet went in. It is always that it went in the back. When it happens, two in a row like this, it is no wonder that the Newtown people began to say it was a new conspiracy of terror by the Klan, to shoot down late stragglers once a week, methodically, with as little compunction as the French Colons shot down the Muslims on the streets of Algiers...or the police in Los Angeles, U.S.A.

With the reverberations of this atrocity by the whites against the blacks still heavy in the air, I went among the people of Newtown and found there a level of acceptance, deeper and more direct than I have felt in any community, including the one in which I have lived all my life. They freed me from the prison of my white skin, from the guilt I felt at the wrongs done them in my white image; they told me I did not have to resign from the white race. They let me clasp hands with them in loving admiration of the dignity and restraint they have shown in struggling all their lives for what I got at the instant of my birth. They gave me, without a sign of suspicion or reproach, the unique friendship of a people to whom the meaning of life has had to be privation, suffering and alienation and have learned to bear it with wisdom and at times, an infectious and inexplicable joy.

They told me that there were white people on Boyte Street that day, standing in the gap with them as they waited for the onslaught of the Klan. They said there were many white people, *Southern* white people, who told them if there were more Rifle Squads to

protect them from reprisals, they would join the struggle on the Negro side. That is what is different about the Negro people of Monroe, North Carolina. They have burned racism clean out of themselves...as they have sweated out the slave. Working together, they could do the same for us, who need this purging infinitely more than they do.

They are PEOPLE WITH STRENGTH.

YOU CAN HELP...

The Committee to Aid the Monroe Defendants has undertaken to raise bail and provide legal defense for victims of the racist frame-ups in Monroe, N. C. Some of these victims face charges carrying penalties of life imprisonment.

Widespread publicity and a mobilization of the forces of decency and fair play will be necessary to save these people from a terrible miscarriage of justice.

You can help by joining CAMD; by contributing to the defense fund; and by sending letters of protest to the Attorney General in Washington, D. C.

Write for further information.

Please send all contributions to:

**COMMITTEE TO AID THE MONROE DEFENDANTS
168 WEST 23rd STREET
NEW YORK 11, N. Y.**

PROGRESSIVE WORKERS MOVEMENT
714 EAST GEORGIA STREET
VANCOUVER 4, B. C.